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Network for a Healthy California's Annual Latino Health Awareness Month Festivities Help Families Make Good Health a Priority While Celebrating Their Latino Heritage

Free Local Event Offers Fun, Educational Activities to Show
Latinos Healthy Change is Within Their Reach

Apple Valley, Calif. September 9, 2010 – Community members today joined the *Network for a Healthy California—Desert Sierra Region Latino Campaign (Network)* and Paul Swick Family Center, the San Bernardino County Public Health Programs, and Saint Mary Medical Center to commemorate Latino Health Awareness Month at Yucca Loma Elementary School Community Garden in Apple Valley, California. The *Network* observes Latino Health Awareness Month each September as a way to encourage Latinos to celebrate their culture and commit to making healthy, active living a priority for themselves, their families and their communities. This year's theme, "Healthy Change is Within Your Reach," acknowledges that while change can be hard, even small steps can lead to big health improvements.

"Latinos face many difficulties when it comes to improving the health of their families, from the cost of fruits and vegetables to the lack of access to safe places for physical activity," said Leticia Salazar Allen, *Latino Campaign* coordinator, *Network for a Healthy California—Desert Sierra Region*. "During today's event, we're helping families overcome these challenges by arming them with the tools and information they need to make the healthiest choices possible. Change isn't easy, but we're showing Latinos they can do it!"

Today's event offered participants a variety of fun and educational activities to help them adopt lifelong healthy habits. Families learned how to put healthy twists on authentic Latin dishes by

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adding delicious fruits and vegetables and using healthier cooking methods. They also discovered fun, low-cost ways to be active through demonstrations of traditional Latin dances like ballet folklórico, salsa and cumbia. In addition, local chef Juan Carlos Pulido prepared healthy Latino recipes featuring in-season fruit and vegetable and offered healthier cooking tips. Special guests Rebecca and Paulin Arroyo, Champion Mom and Dad were also on hand to speak about the benefits of community gardens and their role in supporting their local community gardens in Apple Valley.

California Latinos continue to suffer higher rates of obesity, and the *Network* is part of the solution. With 68.9 percent of San Bernardino County residents ages 18 and above currently overweight or obese, today's Latino Health Awareness Month event is one of the many ways the *Network* is helping families be Champions for Change who incorporate more fruits and vegetables, as well as physical activity into their daily lives. Making these healthy changes helps lower the risk of obesity and the serious health problems that follow.

"For many Latino families, holding on to family heritage and customs is important," continued Leticia Salazar Allen. "Today's event highlighted many ways we can celebrate our culture, while making smarter decisions about our health. Whether it's preparing rich traditional dishes using fresher, more nutritious ingredients or getting our hearts pumping through authentic Latin dances – we can all be proud of who we are, while doing our part to help turn the tide on the obesity epidemic currently threatening our community."

2nd Annual Event of "Harvest to Home Community Garden" in Apple Valley was one of several statewide Latino Health Awareness Month celebrations being held throughout California during the month of September. To find an event near you or for more information about the *Network for a Healthy California*, visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.

About the *Network for a Healthy California*

The California Department of Public Health's *Network for a Healthy California* (*Network*) is a public health effort working with hundreds of partners and organizations to empower low-income Californians to live healthier lives through good nutrition and physical activity. Funding is from the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program). For food stamp information, call 877-847-3663. For important nutrition information visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.

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